

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
HOUSTON DIVISION**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

**ALEXANDRA SMOOTS-THOMAS,
F/K/A ALEXANDRA SMOOTS-HOGAN,
Defendant**

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CRIMINAL NO. H-19-786

PLEA AGREEMENT

The United States of America, by and through Ryan K. Patrick, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Texas, and Ralph E. Imperato, Assistant United States Attorney, and the defendant, Alexandra Smoots-Thomas (“Defendant”), and Defendant’s counsel, pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1)(A) and 11(c)(1)(B) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, state that they have entered into an agreement, the terms and conditions of which are as follows:

Defendant’s Agreement

1. Defendant agrees to plead guilty to Count Seven of the Indictment. Count Seven charges Defendant with Wire Fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343. Defendant, by entering this plea, agrees that she is waiving any right to have the facts that the law makes essential to the punishment either charged in the indictment, or proved to a jury or proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

Punishment Range

2. The statutory maximum penalty for each violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343, is imprisonment of not more than twenty (20) years and a fine of not more than \$250,000 or twice the gross gain or loss. Additionally, Defendant may receive a term of supervised release after imprisonment of up to three (3) years. See Title 18, United States Code,

sections 3559(a)(3) and 3583(b)(2). Defendant acknowledges and understands that if she should violate the conditions of any period of supervised release which may be imposed as part of her sentence, then Defendant may be imprisoned for not more than two (2) years, without credit for time already served on the term of supervised release prior to such violation. *See* Title 18, United States Code, sections 3559(a)(3) and 3583(e)(3). Defendant understands that she cannot have the imposition or execution of the sentence suspended, nor is she eligible for parole.

Mandatory Special Assessment

3. Pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, section 3013(a)(2)(A), immediately after sentencing, Defendant will pay to the Clerk of the United States District Court a special assessment in the amount of one hundred dollars (\$100.00) per count of conviction. The payment will be by cashier's check or money order, payable to the Clerk of the United States District Court, c/o District Clerk's Office, P.O. Box 61010, Houston, Texas 77208, Attention: Finance.

Immigration Consequences

4. Defendant recognizes that pleading guilty may have consequences with respect to her immigration status. Defendant understands that if she is not a citizen of the United States, by pleading guilty she may be removed from the United States, denied citizenship, and denied admission to the United States in the future. Defendant understands that if she is a naturalized United States citizen, pleading guilty may result in immigration consequences, such as denaturalization and potential deportation or removal from the United States. Defendant's attorney has advised Defendant of the potential immigration consequences resulting from Defendant's plea of guilty, and Defendant affirms that she wants to plead guilty regardless of any immigration consequences that may result from the guilty plea and conviction.

Waiver of Appeal and Collateral Review

5. Defendant is aware that Title 28, United States Code, section 1291, and Title 18, United States Code, section 3742, afford a defendant the right to appeal the conviction and sentence imposed. Defendant is also aware that Title 28, United States Code, section 2255, affords the right to contest or “collaterally attack” a conviction or sentence after the judgment of conviction and sentence has become final. Defendant knowingly and voluntarily waives the right to appeal or “collaterally attack” the conviction and sentence, except that Defendant does not waive the right to raise a claim of ineffective assistance of counsel on direct appeal, if otherwise permitted, or on collateral review in a motion under Title 28, United States Code, section 2255. In the event Defendant files a notice of appeal following the imposition of the sentence or later collaterally attacks her conviction or sentence, the United States will assert its rights under this agreement and seek specific performance of these waivers.

6. In agreeing to these waivers, Defendant is aware that a sentence has not yet been determined by the Court. Defendant is also aware that any estimate of the possible sentencing range under the sentencing guidelines that she may have received from her counsel, the United States or the Probation Office, is a prediction and not a promise, did not induce her guilty plea, and is not binding on the United States, the Probation Office or the Court. The United States does not make any promise or representation concerning what sentence the defendant will receive. Defendant further understands and agrees that the United States Sentencing Guidelines are “effectively advisory” to the Court. *See United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220 (2005). Accordingly, Defendant understands that, although the Court must consult the Sentencing

Guidelines and must take them into account when sentencing Defendant, the Court is not bound to follow the Sentencing Guidelines nor sentence Defendant within the calculated guideline range.

7. Defendant understands and agrees that each and all waivers contained in the Agreement are made in exchange for the concessions made by the United States in this plea agreement.

The United States' Agreements

8. The United States agrees to each of the following:

(a) If Defendant pleads guilty to Count Seven (7) of the indictment and persists in that plea through sentencing, and if the Court accepts this plea agreement, the United States will move to dismiss any remaining counts of the indictment at the time of sentencing;

(b) If the Court determines that Defendant qualifies for an adjustment under section 3E1.1(a) of the United States Sentencing Guidelines, and the offense level prior to operation of section 3E1.1(a) is 16 or greater, the United States will move under section 3E1.1(b) for an additional one-level reduction because Defendant timely notified authorities of her intent to plead guilty, thereby permitting the United States to avoid preparing for trial and permitting the United States and the Court to allocate their resources more efficiently.

United States' Non-Waiver of Appeal

9. The United States reserves the right to carry out its responsibilities under guidelines sentencing. Specifically, the United States reserves the right:

(a) to bring its version of the facts of this case, including its evidence file and any investigative files, to the attention of the Probation Office in connection with that office's preparation of a presentence report;

(b) to set forth or dispute sentencing factors or facts material to sentencing;

(c) to seek resolution of such factors or facts in conference with Defendant's counsel and the Probation Office;

(d) to file a pleading relating to these issues, in accordance with section 6A1.2 of the United States Sentencing Guidelines and Title 18, United States Code, section 3553(a); and

- (e) to appeal the sentence imposed or the manner in which it was determined.

Sentence Determination

10. Defendant is aware that the sentence will be imposed after consideration of the United States Sentencing Guidelines and Policy Statements, which are only advisory, as well as the provisions of Title 18, United States Code, section 3553(a). Defendant nonetheless acknowledges and agrees that the Court has authority to impose any sentence up to and including the statutory maximum set for the offense(s) to which Defendant pleads guilty, and that the sentence to be imposed is within the sole discretion of the sentencing judge after the Court has consulted the applicable Sentencing Guidelines. Defendant understands and agrees that the parties' positions regarding the application of the Sentencing Guidelines do not bind the Court and that the sentence imposed is within the discretion of the sentencing judge. If the Court should impose any sentence up to the maximum established by statute, or should the Court order any or all of the sentences imposed to run consecutively, Defendant cannot, for that reason alone, withdraw a guilty plea, and will remain bound to fulfill all of the obligations under this plea agreement.

Rights at Trial

11. Defendant understands that by entering into this agreement, she surrenders certain rights as provided in this plea agreement. Defendant understands that the rights of a defendant include the following:

- (a) If Defendant persisted in a plea of not guilty to the charges, defendant would have the right to a speedy jury trial with the assistance of counsel. The trial may be conducted by a judge sitting without a jury if Defendant, the United States, and the court all agree.
- (b) At a trial, the United States would be required to present witnesses and other evidence against Defendant. Defendant would have the opportunity to confront those witnesses and her attorney would be allowed to cross-examine them. In turn,

Defendant could, but would not be required to, present witnesses and other evidence on her own behalf. If the witnesses for Defendant would not appear voluntarily, she could require their attendance through the subpoena power of the court; and

(c) At a trial, Defendant could rely on a privilege against self-incrimination and decline to testify, and no inference of guilt could be drawn from such refusal to testify. However, if Defendant desired to do so, she could testify on her own behalf.

Factual Basis for Guilty Plea

12. Defendant is pleading guilty because she is in fact guilty of the charges contained in Count Seven (7) of the indictment. If this case were to proceed to trial, the United States could prove each element of the offense beyond a reasonable doubt. The following facts, among others would be offered to establish Defendant's guilt:

Alexandra Smoots-Thomas first ran for judicial office in 2008, winning the seat as the presiding judge of the 164th District Court of Harris County. She successfully ran for re-election in 2012 and 2016. As an elected district judge, assigned to the Civil Trial Division, Smoots-Thomas presided over a wide variety of civil litigation, including civil actions over \$200, divorce and family law disputes, suits for title to land or enforcement of liens on land, contested elections, suits for slander or defamation, and suits on behalf of the State of Texas.

Smoots-Thomas is subject to Texas state law regarding the proper use and reporting of campaign contributions. Texas candidates and office holders who accept a campaign contribution "may not convert the contribution to personal use." Tex. Elec. Code Ann. § 253.035 (West 2019). Covered individuals must also file a report twice each year listing their campaign contributions and "the amount of each payment made during the reporting period from a political contribution if the payment is not a political expenditure, the full name and address of the person to whom the payment is made, and the date and purpose of the payment." *Id.* § 254.031(a)(4).

These forms are filed on-line with the Texas Ethics Commission (TEC). During her first interview with the FBI, Smoots-Thomas confirmed that although she has a campaign treasurer, this position is largely *pro forma*. Smoots-Thomas stated that she prepared and filed her own TEC campaign finance disclosure reports.

During the relevant time period (2011–2018), Smoots-Thomas maintained a campaign bank account at JPMorgan Chase & Co. ending in -1410. She had sole authority over the account, which had a debit card linked to the account and the ability to send money online using Automated Clearing House (ACH) wire transfers.

The investigation revealed Smoots-Thomas stole campaign funds in three separate ways. She used her campaign debit cards to pay for personal items and services. She also authorized ACH transfers, which caused wires from the campaign account to the account of the third party.

Smoots-Thomas used three debit cards, all linked to the -1410 account, to charge a series of expenses that she later admitted were clearly personal. As the card was linked to the campaign account, and she was the sole signatory on that account, she did not need to move money into her personal account—she simply put it on the card. These charges include handbag purchases at the Prada shop in the Bellagio in Las Vegas (\$1,163.91 on Jan. 22, 2016) and an engagement ring purchase at Zales Jewelry (\$761.74).

Smoots-Thomas also made online wire transfer payments out of her campaign account. These wire payments were initiated in the Southern District of Texas. Among the highest are two clearly personal expenses: monthly payments for the mortgage on her home. She paid Gateway Mortgage \$2,952.25 on August 2, 2016, and \$8,856.75 on March 2, 2017.

Smoots-Thomas also used ACH wire transfers to make tuition payments for her children. These include payments to The Regis School of \$7,441.99 payment on May 16, 2016, and again on February 14, 2017.

Smoots-Thomas solicited campaign contributions through emails, campaign flyers, and at campaign fundraisers. Her requests for money form a core part of the fraud, because the donors believed they were contributing to her campaign, not to a fund for her personal use. The FBI has interviewed eight attorneys, from solo practitioners to large firm partners. These individuals stated that they contributed to the campaign of Smoot-Thomas because of a request for funds, and that they gave because they believed the money would be spent on campaign related expenses.

Smoots-Thomas's conduct caused a stream of interstate wire transmissions. Each time she used the debit card, or authorized an ACH wire transfer, she caused her bank to send an interstate wire transfer. JPMorgan Chase confirmed to the FBI that all the company's transactions clear through servers located in Delaware or Illinois, meaning that both debit card and ACH transactions necessarily involve interstate wires.

On November 13, 2018, Special Agents Coy Davis and Sean Powers met Smoots-Thomas and her husband at a local Starbucks. Smoots-Thomas agreed to speak with the FBI Special Agents. Smoots-Thomas admitted to the most egregious expenses, including the mortgage payments and the engagement ring. She explained her conduct, by saying that "there are times when I got behind," but she also admitted that her campaign donors would not have thought they were donating "for the trips to Vegas." When asked, "You feel like you deceived them," she answered: "I potentially deceived everybody if that's what you're asking." Later in the interview, Smoots-Thomas also admitted she was "sure that I probably have made a monthly tuition payment from campaign whatever."

Breach of Plea Agreement

13. If Defendant should fail in any way to fulfill completely all of the obligations under this plea agreement, the United States will be released from its obligations under the plea agreement, and Defendant's plea and sentence will stand. If at any time Defendant retains, conceals, or disposes of assets in violation of this plea agreement, or if Defendant knowingly withholds evidence or is otherwise not completely truthful with the United States, then the United States may move the Court to set aside the guilty plea and reinstate prosecution. Any information and documents that have been disclosed by Defendant, whether prior to or subsequent to this plea agreement, and all leads derived therefrom, will be used against defendant in any prosecution.

Restitution, Forfeiture, and Fines – Generally

14. This Plea Agreement is being entered into by the United States on the basis of Defendant's express representation that he/she will make a full and complete disclosure of all assets over which he/she exercises direct or indirect control, or in which he/she has any financial interest. Defendant agrees not to dispose of any assets or take any action that would effect a transfer of property in which he/she has an interest, unless Defendant obtains the prior written permission of the United States.

15. Defendant agrees to make complete financial disclosure by truthfully executing a sworn financial statement (Form OBD-500 or similar form) within 14 days of signing this plea agreement. Defendant agrees to authorize the release of all financial information requested by the United States, including, but not limited to, executing authorization forms permitting the United States to obtain tax information, bank account records, credit histories, and social security information. Defendant agrees to discuss and answer any questions by the United States relating to Defendant's complete financial disclosure.

16. Defendant agrees to take all steps necessary to pass clear title to forfeitable assets to the United States and to assist fully in the collection of restitution and fines, including, but not limited to, surrendering title, executing a warranty deed, signing a consent decree, stipulating to facts regarding the transfer of title and the basis for the forfeiture, and signing any other documents necessary to effectuate such transfer. Defendant also agrees to direct any banks which have custody of her assets to deliver all funds and records of such assets to the United States.

17. Defendant understands that forfeiture, restitution, and fines are separate components of sentencing and are separate obligations.

Restitution

18. Defendant agrees to pay full restitution to the victim(s) regardless of the count(s) of conviction. Defendant understands and agrees that the Court will determine the amount of restitution to fully compensate the victim(s). Defendant agrees that restitution imposed by the Court will be due and payable immediately and that Defendant will not attempt to avoid or delay payment. Subject to the provisions above, Defendant waives the right to challenge in any manner, including by direct appeal or in a collateral proceeding, the restitution order imposed by the Court.

Forfeiture

19. Defendant stipulates and agrees that the property listed in the Indictment's Notice of Forfeiture (and in any supplemental Notices) is subject to forfeiture, and Defendant agrees to the forfeiture of that property.

20. Defendant agrees to waive any and all interest in any asset which is the subject of a related administrative or judicial forfeiture proceeding, whether criminal or civil, federal or state.

21. Defendant consents to the order of forfeiture becoming final as to Defendant immediately following this guilty plea, pursuant to Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 32.2(b)(4)(A).

22. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 7 above, Defendant waives the right to challenge the forfeiture of property in any manner, including by direct appeal or in a collateral proceeding.

Fines

23. Defendant understands that under the Sentencing Guidelines the Court is permitted to order Defendant to pay a fine that is sufficient to reimburse the government for the costs of any imprisonment or term of supervised release, if any. Defendant agrees that any fine imposed by the Court will be due and payable immediately, and Defendant will not attempt to avoid or delay payment. Subject to the provisions above, Defendant waives the right to challenge the fine in any manner, including by direct appeal or in a collateral proceeding.

Complete Agreement

24. This written plea agreement, consisting of 13 pages, including the attached addendum of Defendant and her attorney, constitutes the complete plea agreement between the United States, Defendant, and Defendant's counsel. No promises or representations have been made by the United States except as set forth in writing in this plea agreement. Defendant acknowledges that no threats have been made against her and that she is pleading guilty freely and voluntarily because she is guilty.

25. Any modification of this plea agreement must be in writing and signed by all parties.

Filed at Houston, Texas, on September 17, 2020.

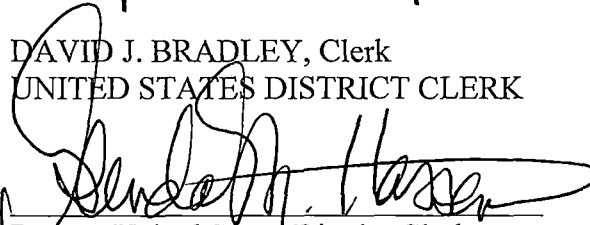


Alexandra Smoots-Thomas
Defendant

Subscribed and sworn to before me on September 17, 2020.

DAVID J. BRADLEY, Clerk
UNITED STATES DISTRICT CLERK

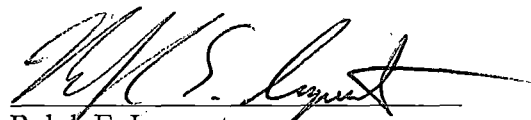
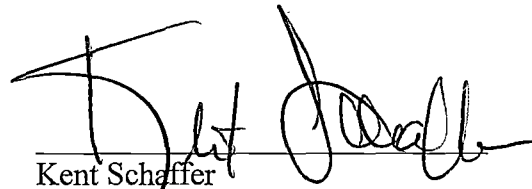
By:


Deputy United States District Clerk

APPROVED:

Ryan K. Patrick
United States Attorney

By:


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Southern District of Texas
713-567-9384
Kent Schaffer
Attorney for Defendant

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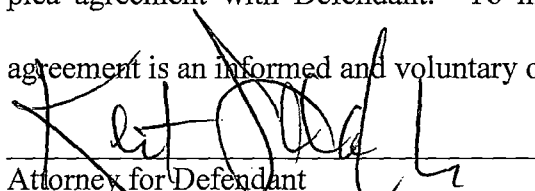
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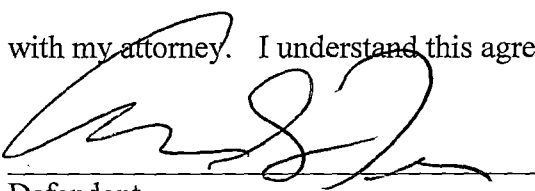
PLEA AGREEMENT -- ADDENDUM

I have fully explained to Defendant her rights with respect to the pending indictment. I have reviewed the provisions of the United States Sentencing Commission's Guidelines Manual and Policy Statements and I have fully and carefully explained to Defendant the provisions of those Guidelines which may apply in this case. I have also explained to Defendant that the Sentencing Guidelines are only advisory and the court may sentence Defendant up to the maximum allowed by statute per count of conviction. Further, I have carefully reviewed every part of this plea agreement with Defendant. To my knowledge, Defendant's decision to enter into this agreement is an informed and voluntary one.


Attorney for Defendant


Date

I have consulted with my attorney and fully understand all my rights with respect to the indictment pending against me. My attorney has fully explained, and I understand, all my rights with respect to the provisions of the United States Sentencing Commission's Guidelines Manual which may apply in my case. I have read and carefully reviewed every part of this plea agreement with my attorney. I understand this agreement and I voluntarily agree to its terms.


Defendant


Date